



Impact of policy decisions on the effectiveness of free education in public secondary schools in Anambra State, Nigeria

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Abstract

This study assessed the impact of policy decisions on the effectiveness of free education in public secondary schools in Anambra State, Nigeria. The free education policy, rooted in national frameworks such as the Universal Basic Education Act and the National Policy on Education, aims to eliminate financial barriers and ensure equitable access to quality education. Despite government commitment, including recent expansions of free education coverage by the Anambra State Government, implementation gaps persist, raising concerns about the role of decision-making processes at the school level. This study specifically examined the extent of principals' involvement and data verification practices in the implementation of the free education policy. A descriptive survey research design was adopted. The population comprised 258 principals of public secondary schools across six education zones in Anambra State. A sample of 158 principals from Awka, Aguata, and Nnewi education zones was selected using simple random sampling. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire titled "Impact of Policy Decisions on the Effectiveness of Free Education Questionnaire (IPDEFEQ)", structured on a four-point rating scale. The instrument was validated by experts in Educational Management and Measurement and Evaluation, and reliability was established using Cronbach's Alpha, yielding high reliability coefficients (0.967 for both clusters). Out of 158 distributed questionnaires, 138 were duly completed and analyzed, representing an 87% return rate. Mean and standard deviation were used to answer the research questions, with 2.50 as the benchmark for high extent. Findings revealed that principals' participation in the implementation of the free education policy was to a high extent (grand mean = 3.04), indicating active involvement in interpreting policy objectives, communicating guidelines, collaborating with stakeholders, and fostering teamwork. Similarly, data verification was found to influence policy implementation to a high extent (grand mean = 3.11), demonstrating that accurate enrollment records, attendance data, and funding reports enhance effective planning, equitable resource allocation, and accountability. The pooled standard deviations indicated homogeneity in respondents' views. The study concluded that effective policy decisions, particularly principals' active involvement and systematic data verification, significantly enhance the implementation of free education in public secondary schools in Anambra State. It recommended institutionalizing participatory decision-making processes and strengthening data management systems, including digitalized Education Management Information Systems (EMIS), to sustain the gains of free education and improve educational outcomes.

Keywords: Education, policy decision and free education

Introduction

Education is universally recognized as a fundamental human right and a key driver of national development. It serves as the foundation for individual empowerment, economic growth, social progress, and political stability. Consequently, governments across the world have continued to invest heavily in education through various reforms and policies aimed at ensuring access, equity, and quality learning. In Nigeria, education occupies a central position in national development plans, and successive governments have made deliberate efforts to make education accessible to all citizens through policies such as the Universal Basic Education (UBE) Act, 2004 [12]. The law governing UBE, which mandates free, compulsory, and universal basic education for children of primary and junior secondary school age in Nigeria. National Policy on Education, 2013 [25] (NPE). This policy declares education as an instrument par excellence for national development. It provides the overall framework for educational planning in Nigeria and Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (1999, as amended) [11] - Section 18 includes provisions about government's duty to eradicate illiteracy and provide free primary education.

The Free Education Policy was introduced to remove financial barriers that hinder children from attending school, particularly at the basic and secondary levels. The policy is designed to ensure that every child of within the bracket of secondary school-going age has access to education without the burden of tuition fees or other direct costs. According to Federal Ministry of Education Handbook / Universal Basic Education Commission (UBE) 2019 [9]. The UBE Programme launched in 1999 made provision for free, compulsory, and universal basic education (primary and junior secondary). It notes "free compulsory and universal basic education for every Nigerian child within the age of primary and junior secondary school age."

In line with the National Policy on Education (2013) [25], the free education initiative aims to achieve universal access to education, promote literacy, and reduce the rate of school dropouts across the country. However, the successful implementation of this policy largely depends on effective policy formulation, decision-making, and administrative execution at both state and local government levels. In Anambra State, the government has consistently expressed commitment to providing free functional and qualitative education at the public secondary school level. The

Executive Governor of Anambra State Prof. Charles Chukwuma Soludo declares continuation in free and compulsory education from nursery to junior secondary schools previously to senior secondary education in Anambra and that no child in that education range shall pay school fees or related dues. The incumbent governor of Anambra State clearly stated that the aim of being emphatic about the free education policy include; to reduce unauthorized fees and truancy which appears to pave ways for forming gangs, cult involvement, misuse of drug and unhealthy peer influence among others. Various programmes and interventions have been introduced to actualize this goal, such as the provision of instructional materials, employment of qualified teachers, and construction of school infrastructure. Despite these efforts, implementation of free education still appears an uphill task. Issues such as principals' involvement, data verification, human resource allocation, monitoring and political interference have often seemed a hindrance to the attainment of the policy objectives.

According to Aliyu *et al* (2025) ^[3], policy and decision-making processes play a critical role in determining how effectively education policies are implemented. Decision-making involves identifying problems, formulating strategies, allocating resources, and evaluating outcomes. In many cases, the implementation of education policies in Nigeria is affected by inconsistent decisions, political interference, due to lack of continuity in governance. Consequently, policies that appear sound on paper often fail to achieve their intended goals due to weak decisions in effective implementation strategies and poor coordination among key actors in the education sector.

Decision-making processes determine the direction, scope, and sustainability of educational reforms. Effective decisions ensure that the goals of free education accessibility, equity, and quality-are clearly articulated, backed by resources, and implemented through well-coordinated actions. However, when policy objectives are not explicitly defined, decision-makers (principals) at different administrative levels (state, local education authorities, and schools) interpret the policy differently. This leads to fragmentation, misallocation of resources, and uneven outcomes among public secondary schools.

Moreover, decision-making determines how policy inconsistencies are managed or mitigated. When education decisions are centralized and politically driven, continuity suffers because new leaders may disregard existing policies. Conversely, when decisions are institutionalized within education management bodies (like the State Ministry of Education, Post Primary Schools Service Commission, or UBEC partnerships), policy consistency improves. In Anambra State, for example, while the Soludo administration (2022-present) has expanded the scope of free education to cover all levels of public secondary education (The Cable, 2024; Vanguard, 2024) ^[27], earlier administrations defined "free education" differently. This variation illustrates how decision-making at the policy level influences continuity, sustainability, and public trust.

In Anambra State, recent administrations have demonstrated varying interpretations of the free education policy. For example, while previous administrations provided partial free education (mainly tuition waivers), Governor Soludo's administration extended it to include both junior and senior secondary levels (The Cable, 2024; Vanguard, 2024) ^[27].

While this reflects progress, the absence of a binding legislative framework means that a change in government could again alter or discontinue the programme highlighting the ongoing relevance of ensuring policy consistency to sustain gains in access, equity, and quality.

Inconsistency in government policies is highly relevant to the success or failure of free education implementation. Frequent policy changes disrupt planning, financing, and evaluation, eroding the effectiveness of government efforts to achieve inclusive education. Therefore, to ensure sustainable implementation, Nigeria and Anambra State in particular must institutionalize education policies through legislation, participatory decision-making, and long-term strategic planning. Policy consistency is not only a governance issue; it is a precondition for achieving the goals of free, equitable, and quality education for all.

A factor that seems to influence the implementation of free education policy is involvement of principals. Effective educational policy implementation depends greatly on the degree to which key stakeholders such as principals, teachers, parents, students, community leaders, education boards, and non-governmental organizations-are involved in the policy and decision-making process. In the context of the free education policy in Anambra State, principals' involvement ensures that policies are realistic, contextually appropriate, and sustainable. Conversely, the absence of principals' participation often results in poor ownership, limited accountability, and weak implementation outcomes. Principals involvement is a crucial determinant of how effectively the free education policy is implemented in Anambra State. Inclusive decision-making enhances transparency, ownership, and sustainability of education among education stakeholders. For free education to achieve its goals of access, equity, and quality, decision-makers must institutionalize principals' participation in all stages of policy implementation.

Studies specific to decision-making in African educational contexts emphasize the influence of organizational and external factors. For example, Oloruntegbe and Adeyemo (2020) ^[21] found that principals' decision-making competence significantly correlates with schools' administrative performance, particularly when decisions involve resource allocation and policy compliance. Their study highlighted that both internal leadership capacity and external socio-political pressures influence how decisions are made and enacted in schools.

Recent work by Mulkeen and Chen (2023) ^[18] further underscores the importance of adaptive decision-making in educational leadership, especially in contexts marked by policy reforms such as free education initiatives. Their research shows that leaders who adapt decisions based on emerging challenges and stakeholder needs are more likely to implement policies successfully and achieve intended outcomes.

Overall, the literature suggests that decision-making in education is multifaceted, blending analytical reasoning, evidence use, and collaborative engagement. Effective decision-making practices lay the foundation for successful implementation of educational policies, including free education policies, by ensuring coherent action, stakeholder support, and responsive leadership.

Decision-making in educational settings encompasses a range of approaches and styles that principals and administrators use to guide school operations, implement

policies, and solve emerging problems. These types vary in terms of participation, authority distribution, use of evidence, and adaptability to context.

One major dimension of decision-making in schools is participation level. Participatory decision-making involves engaging teachers, staff, and other stakeholders in identifying problems, generating alternatives, and selecting actions. Research shows that participatory practices can enhance collaboration, buy-in, and overall school effectiveness, especially when principals seek input prior to final decisions (Adegbiyi *et al.*, 2025; Journals reviewed)^[7]. On the other hand, consultative decision-making balances stakeholder involvement with leadership authority. In this style, educators' views are sought to inform the decision, but the principal retains final authority. This approach supports inclusive leadership while maintaining timely decisions, which is important when the outcomes will significantly affect school operations.

Another recognized category is delegative decision-making, where authority and responsibility are intentionally given to others such as department heads or teachers to decide on specific tasks or issues. This strategy can promote empowerment and innovation within the school, fostering ownership among staff members (Chinelo, 2025)^[7].

In addition to styles based on participation, decision-making can be classified based on how decisions are made. For example, centralized decision-making concentrates authority in the principal or top administrative level, typically leading to faster decisions but less stakeholder input. Conversely, decentralized decision-making spreads authority across levels, encouraging stakeholder engagement and often aligning with school-based management practices that boost accountability and responsiveness (Cornito, 2021)^[8].

An increasingly important type is data-driven decision-making, where school leaders utilize empirical evidence such as student performance data, attendance reports, and assessment outcomes to inform their choices. Studies in Nigerian contexts have shown that data-driven decision approaches support school improvement initiatives by making decisions more objective and outcome-focused (Nnorom *et al.*, 2023)^[20].

However, school decision-making is not a singular process but a spectrum of practices ranging from participatory and consultative methods to delegated, centralized, decentralized, and data-driven approaches. Each type addresses different administrative needs and challenges, and effective educational leaders often blend multiple types to suit particular contexts and leadership goals.

Principals are central actors in the implementation of educational policies, including free education initiatives. Their decision-making practices directly influence how policies are translated into actionable school-level strategies, how resources are allocated, and how teachers and students engage with policy objectives (Bush & Glover, 2017)^[4].

The type of decision-making adopted by a principal affects the effectiveness and efficiency of policy implementation.

Another factor that appears to influence the implementation of free education is data verification. Effective education policy and decision-making depend heavily on accurate, reliable, and up-to-date data. Data serve as simultaneous foundation for identifying educational needs, setting priorities, allocating resources, and evaluating outcomes. In Nigeria, and particularly in Anambra State, inadequate data collection mechanisms have been persistent challenges

affecting the implementation of free education policies and informed decision-making within the secondary school system.

Student Enrollment Data – Accurate enrollment figures allow principals to plan resources effectively, such as assigning teachers, allocating classrooms, and providing teaching materials. Underestimation or overestimation can lead to overcrowded classes, insufficient teaching materials, or misallocation of staff, which undermines the goals of free education policies (Nnorom *et al.*, 2023)^[20]. **Attendance Records** – Monitoring student attendance ensures that learning outcomes and policy objectives are met. Principals can identify patterns of absenteeism, intervene early, and implement support strategies. Accurate attendance data is also vital for reporting to educational authorities and for evaluating the effectiveness of policy implementation at the school level (Adegbiyi *et al.*, 2025). **Funding Reports** – Proper financial reporting ensures that government-provided funds are used efficiently and transparently. Accurate data on funding disbursement, school expenditures, and resource utilization allows principals to prioritize critical needs, reduce wastage, and maintain compliance with policy requirements (Leithwood *et al.*, 2020)^[17].

Studies in Nigerian contexts emphasize that errors or delays in school data can compromise the implementation of educational policies. For example, in Delta and Anambra States, inaccurate student enrollment and attendance records have led to misallocation of resources, delayed procurement of teaching materials, and uneven distribution of teachers hindering the objectives of free education initiatives (Ossai & Okokoyo, 2023; Ikegbusi *et al.*, 2025)^[15, 22].

In summary, accurate data empowers principals to make evidence-based decisions, coordinate resources effectively, monitor policy compliance, and evaluate outcomes. Without reliable information, policy implementation risks becoming reactive rather than proactive, resulting in inefficiencies and reduced impact on students' learning and school performance. Accurate data collection and verification are foundational to effective educational administration, enabling school leaders to make evidence-based decisions that improve teaching, learning, and overall school performance. Data verification in this context refers to the systematic checking of information (e.g., student enrollment, attendance, assessment results) to ensure its accuracy, reliability, and relevance before it is used for decision-making or reporting.

Studies indicated that when principals and administrators use verified data, they are better able to plan strategically, allocate resources efficiently, identify school needs, and monitor progress toward policy objectives. For example, research on instructional data use demonstrates that school leaders who embed verified student and school performance data into decision processes can drive improvements in instructional practices and student outcomes (Rose, 2025)^[23]. Another study highlights that creating conditions for effective data use including verification structures, data teams, and collaborative interpretation supports sustained improvement efforts. School leaders who establish a culture of verified data use create environments where teachers and administrators can jointly analyze verified information and make informed adjustments to instructional activity and policy implementation (Kim Schildkamp *et al.*, 2019)^[16]. Empirical evidence also shows that principal leadership practices are essential for promoting data use when schools

operate under high-stakes accountability systems. In contexts such as Chile, leaders who support systematic verification and use of instructional data help ensure that schools move beyond compliance to use evidence for continuous improvement, aligning local actions with broader policy goals.

In Nigerian educational settings, findings suggest that school leaders who develop data literacy skills (including verification skills) are more confident and proactive in using student performance and attendance data in decision processes. Effective data verification enables principals to identify patterns and trends accurately, contributing to evidence-based administrative decisions that support policy implementation and school improvement (Nigerian Journal of Education Administration and Planning, 2024) ^[19].

Across the literature, researchers emphasize that without proper verification and use of educational data, decisions risk being based on incomplete, inaccurate, or misinterpreted information leading to inefficient resource allocation, poor instructional planning, and weakened policy outcomes. Therefore, principals must not only collect data but also verify its quality and relevance before using it to guide implementation decisions and performance monitoring.

Effective educational administration depends heavily on accurate, timely, and verifiable data. When data management is weak or flawed, principals and school administrators face significant challenges that can undermine the implementation of policies such as free education. Poor data management encompasses issues such as inaccurate student enrollment numbers, incomplete attendance records, delayed financial reports, and inconsistent performance tracking. Inefficient Resource Allocation – Without accurate data on student numbers and school needs, principals cannot plan or distribute resources effectively. Overcrowded classrooms, insufficient teaching materials, and mis-assigned teachers are common outcomes of poor data management (Nnorom *et al.*, 2023) ^[20]. Misallocation can also lead to inequities across schools, particularly when government funding is distributed based on unreliable information.

Reduced Policy Compliance – Inaccurate or incomplete data make it difficult for school leaders to monitor and enforce compliance with educational policies. For example, under free education programs, principals may struggle to ensure that all eligible students are benefiting from the policy, or that funds and resources reach the intended targets (Adegbiyi *et al.*, 2025).

Poor Decision-Making – Decisions made on unverified or incomplete data often result in ineffective strategies, misprioritized actions, and delayed interventions. Administrators may misinterpret student performance trends, fail to identify at-risk learners, or overlook areas requiring urgent attention (Hallinger & Lee, 2019) ^[14].

Weak Accountability and Reporting – School leaders are required to report on student performance, attendance, and resource utilization to educational authorities. Poor data management can compromise the accuracy of these reports, leading to weak accountability and potentially jeopardizing government funding or policy evaluation (Ossai & Okokoyo, 2023) ^[22].

Inhibited Monitoring and Evaluation – Effective monitoring of school programs and policy implementation relies on verified data. Without it, principals cannot track progress,

evaluate outcomes, or make evidence-based adjustments, resulting in suboptimal implementation of educational initiatives (Ikegbusi *et al.*, 2025) ^[15].

Erosion of Stakeholder Confidence – Teachers, parents, and government agencies rely on accurate school data to assess progress and trust policy interventions. Persistent data inaccuracies can reduce stakeholder confidence and diminish support for school initiatives (Leithwood *et al.*, 2020) ^[17].

Research in Nigerian contexts highlights these challenges. Studies in Anambra and Delta States found that inaccurate student enrollment and attendance records, delayed reporting, and poor data verification practices hindered principals' ability to implement policies effectively, reduce teacher productivity, and compromise student outcomes (Ossai & Okokoyo, 2023; Ikegbusi *et al.*, 2025; Nnorom *et al.*, 2023) ^[15, 22].

In summary, poor data management is a significant barrier to effective educational administration. It limits principals' capacity to make informed decisions, allocate resources, enforce compliance, and evaluate policy outcomes. Strengthening data management practices is therefore essential for the successful implementation of policies such as free education in Nigerian secondary schools.

Studies reviewed indicated that data verification is critical to effective policy implementation. When principals ensure that student enrollment records, attendance logs, and funding reports are accurate and reliable, they can make informed decisions that facilitate smooth execution of educational policies (Hallinger & Lee, 2019; Adegbiyi *et al.*, 2025) ^[3, 9]. Verified data allows for proper resource allocation, teacher deployment, and monitoring of student progress, all of which are essential for implementing free education initiatives.

Conversely, poor data management undermines policy implementation. Nigerian studies show that inaccurate student enrollment or attendance records, delayed reporting, and unverified funding information create challenges for principals in planning and coordinating school activities. For example, in Delta and Anambra States, principals reported that unverified data led to misallocation of resources, ineffective teacher deployment, and challenges in tracking student access to free education, directly impeding policy outcomes (Ossai & Okokoyo, 2023; Ikegbusi *et al.*, 2025; Nnorom *et al.*, 2023) ^[15, 22].

By implementing systematic data verification processes, principals can: Detect and correct errors in enrollment and attendance records; Ensure transparency and accountability in the use of government-provided funds; Track student participation and engagement to align classroom practices with policy objectives; Make evidence-based decisions that enhance both teacher performance and student outcomes.

Therefore, Research Question 2 is addressed through evidence that data verification positively influences policy implementation. Schools that prioritize accurate and verified data enable principals to convert policy directives into actionable strategies, ensuring that free education policies reach the intended beneficiaries and achieve their intended goals.

To overcome the challenges attributed to data verification, the Anambra State Ministry of Education and other education stakeholders need to; establish reliable data collection systems using digital school census and EMIS (Education Management Information Systems); promote

research partnerships between universities, NGOs, and government agencies to provide empirical evidence for policy design; build capacity of education planners and administrators in data analysis and interpretation; and institutionalize monitoring and evaluation as a continuous process rather than a periodic event. These measures will ensure that free education policies are data-driven, cost-effective, and sustainable. Clearly inadequate data have a profound influence on the implementation and decision-making processes of the free education policy in Anambra State. Without accurate data, policies are likely to be misdirected, resources misallocated, and goals unmet. Therefore, to achieve inclusive, equitable, and quality education, data-driven decision-making must be institutionalized as a core component of educational policy formulation and implementation.

Education policies are expected to serve as strategic tools for achieving equitable access, quality learning, and national development. The free education policy in Nigeria, particularly in Anambra State, was designed to eliminate financial barriers and ensure that every child enjoys the right to education regardless of socio-economic background. However, despite the existence of this policy and the state government's commitment to its implementation, the desired outcomes such as increased enrollment, improved retention, and quality learning - have not been fully realized in many public secondary schools.

Several reports and observations suggest that the gap between policy formulation and implementation remains wide. In many instances, education policies are crafted without sufficient principals' consultation, resulting in poor alignment between policy objectives and the realities on the ground. Also, inadequate data utilization in the education system is an issue, without reliable information, policy implementation risks becoming reactive rather than proactive, resulting in inefficiencies and reduced impact on students' learning and school performance. This raises pertinent questions about how decision-making influence the extent to which free education policy is actually realized in public secondary schools. This study therefore, assessed the impact of policy decisions on the effectiveness of free education in public secondary schools in Anambra State, Nigeria.

The study aimed to assess the impact of policy decisions on the effectiveness of free education in public secondary schools in Anambra State, Nigeria. The study specifically examined:

1. principals' involvement on the implementation of free education policy in public secondary schools in Anambra State.
2. the extent of data verification on the implementation of free education policy in public secondary schools in Anambra State.

This study will be of immense benefits to the following groups; Government and Policy Makers, Educational Administrators and School Principals, Teachers and Other Stakeholders, Researchers and Academics, Students and the General Public.

The findings would provide valuable insights to government and policy makers into how decision-making processes influence educational outcomes. This would help government agencies in Anambra State and Nigeria at large to design more effective and realistic education policies,

reduce implementation challenges, and ensure that free education objectives are achieved.

The study would guide principals, education officers, and administrators in understanding how their decisions and leadership roles affect the implementation of government policies at the school level. This knowledge enables them to align their administrative practices with government directives on free education.

Teachers, parents, and community members would gain a clearer understanding of their roles in ensuring the sustainability of free education initiatives through active participation in school decision-making and monitoring. This awareness enables them to better appreciate their roles and responsibilities in achieving the goals of the Free Education Policy. By understanding decision-making processes, teachers, parents, and community members would be encouraged to participate actively in the execution of educational policies at the school and community levels, rather than being passive observers.

The study would serve as a reference material for future researchers interested in education policy, decision-making, and implementation studies in Nigeria and other developing countries. The study would contribute to the body of knowledge on educational policy analysis, governance, and implementation.

Finally, the research would raise awareness of the importance of accountability and transparency in educational governance, thereby promoting collective responsibility in achieving quality education for all. By identifying and addressing decision-making challenges, the study promotes fairness and inclusion.

The study assessing the impact of policy decisions on the effectiveness of free education in public secondary schools in Anambra State, Nigeria.

This study focuses on the assessing the impact of policy decisions on the effectiveness of free education in public secondary schools in Anambra State, Nigeria.

The Content Scope covered:

- principals' involvement on the implementation of free education policy.
- the extent of data verification on the implementation of free education policy

The geographical scope will be limited to selected public secondary schools in Anambra State, to provide a representative view of policy implementation across the state.

Research Questions

Two research questions guided the study;

1. To what extent do principals participate in the implementation of the free education policy in public secondary schools in Anambra State?
2. To what extent does data verification affect the implementation of the free education policy in public secondary schools in Anambra State?

Research Method

The study adopted a descriptive survey research design. This design was considered appropriate because it enabled the researcher to describe decision-making practices in the implementation of free education policy without manipulating any variables. This design is deemed appropriate for this research, since the researcher will collect data in a systematic manner from a given population

of the study to determine the impact of policy decisions on the effectiveness of free education in public secondary schools in Anambra State, Nigeria. The study was conducted in Anambra State, Nigeria, focusing on public secondary schools implementing the free education policy.

The population of the study was 258 which comprised of all principals of public secondary schools in the six education zones; Awka zone 61; Aguata zone 47; Nnewi zones 50; Ogidi zone 40; Onitsha zone 32 and Otuocha zone 28 respectively all in Anambra State. A sample of 158 principals which comprised of all the principals of public secondary schools in three education zones: Awka zone 61; Aguata zone 47 and Nnewi zones 50 was selected using simple random sampling technique. The instrument used for data collection was a structured questionnaire titled: Assessing the Impact of Policy Decisions on the Effectiveness of Free Education in Public Secondary Schools in Anambra State, Nigeria. (AIPDEFEQ). The questionnaire was structured on a four-point Likert scale of: Very High Extent (4); High Extent (3); Low Extent (2) and Very Low Extent (1). The instrument consisted of two sections aligned with the research questions.

The instrument was validated by experts in Educational Management and Measurement and Evaluation who are

lecturers in the Faculty of Education, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, to ensure content and face validity. The reliability of the instrument was ascertained using trial-test method and it yielded reliability co-efficient of 0.967 and 0.967 for clusters I and II and the overall coefficient of the entire instrument was 1.934. Cronach's Alpha method was used to determine the reliability coefficient. The researchers administered copies of the instrument directly to the respondents with the help of five research assistants in a selected sampled schools. A total of 158 copies of the questionnaire were distributed, 138 copies were properly filled and successfully retrieved, indicating 87% percent return. The collected data were used for the analyses. Mean and Standard Deviation was used in answering the research questions. In taking decisions, 2.50 and above was to a Very High Extent. On the other hand, 2.49 and below was to a Low Extent

Results

The results are presented in tables in accordance with the research questions.

Research Question 1: To what extent do principals participate in the implementation of the free education policy in public secondary schools in Anambra State?

Table 1: Mean ratings and standard deviation scores of principals on their extent of participation in the implementation of free education policy in public secondary schools in Anambra State

S/N	Items	Mean	SD	Remarks
1	Principals play a major role in interpreting the objectives of the free education policy to teachers and students.	3.00	0.77	HE
2	The principal ensures that all staff understand the policy guidelines from the ministry of education.	2.95	0.78	HE
3	Principals communicate information about free education policy effectively to parents and stakeholders.	2.96	0.74	HE
4	The principal organizes regular staff meetings to plan and review free education policy implementation	2.96	0.74	HE
5	The principal provides clear instructions that align with the goals of the free education policy	2.97	0.75	HE
6	Principals collaborate with Parent-Teacher Associations (PTAs) to enhance policy implementation.	3.02	0.76	HE
7	Principals maintain effective communication with local education authorities to ensure compliance with free education policy	3.04	0.74	HE
8	The principal involves teachers in decision-making processes related to free education implementation	3.16	2.06	HE
9	Principals encourage community participation in improving school infrastructure under the policy	3.32	3.17	HE
10	The principal fosters teamwork among staff to achieve the objectives of the free education policy	3.03	0.71	HE
	Mean of Means	3.04	1.12	HE

The result in the table 1 showed that the mean scores of principals were all above the 2.50 indicating high extent of the involvement of the items. The pooled standard deviation scores of 1.12 indicates convergence of their responses implying that their responses are homogenous. This is to say that there was high extent of principals participate in the

implementation of free education policy in public secondary schools in Anamabra State.

Research Question 2: To what extent does data verification affect the implementation of the free education policy in public secondary schools in Anambra State?

Table 2: Mean ratings and standard deviation scores of principals on the extent of data verification in the implementation of free education policy in public secondary schools in Anambra State

S/N	Items	Mean	SD	Remark
11	Verified data on student enrollment helps in effective planning of free education programs.	3.44	4.27	HE
12	The accuracy of verified data influences the allocation of educational resources	2.97	0.74	HE
13	Data verification ensures that the free education policy is planned based on actual school needs.	2.92	0.78	HE
14	The absence of proper data verification leads to poor decision-making in policy planning	3.13	0.74	HE
15	Data verification helps the government identify the true number of beneficiaries of free education	3.06	0.74	HE
16	Verified data helps in equitable distribution of teaching and learning materials	3.04	0.71	HE
17	Proper data verification prevents the misallocation of funds meant for free education	3.39	3.17	HE
18	Regular data verification ensures that only eligible schools benefit from government provisions	3.24	2.16	HE
19	The Ministry of Education relies on verified data for effective disbursement of school grants	2.94	0.73	HE
20	Lack of verified data leads to discrepancies in resource distribution among public secondary schools.	2.96	0.69	HE
	Mean of Means	3.11	1.47	HE

The result in the table 2 showed that the mean scores of principals were all above the 2.50 indicating high extent of the agreement of the items. The pooled standard deviation scores of 1.47 indicate convergence of their responses implying that their responses are homogenous. This is to say that data verification affects the implementation of free education policy in public secondary schools in Anambra State to a high extent.

Based on data analysis, it was found out that;

- The extent to which principals participate in the implementation of the free education policy in public secondary schools in Anambra State, Nigeria was high.
- The extent to which data verification affect the implementation of the free education policy in public secondary schools in Anambra State, Nigeria was high.

Discussion of Findings

It was found out that principals demonstrate a high level of participation in the implementation of the free education policy. This suggests that principals actively interpret policy objectives, communicate guidelines to staff and stakeholders, collaborate with PTAs, engage local authorities, and foster teamwork among staff. The result is consistent with studies by Bush and Glover (2017) and Hallinger and Lee (2019) [4, 14], which found that active school leadership significantly enhances policy implementation and organizational effectiveness.

The findings of this study also revealed that data verification exercises influence the implementation of free education policy in public secondary schools in Anambra State to a high extent. The result aligns with the position of Hallinger and Lee (2019) [14], who emphasized that school leadership effectiveness depends significantly on access to reliable and timely information for informed decision-making.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of this study, it was concluded that principals to a high extent participate in the implementation and data verification exercises influence the implementation free education policy in public secondary schools in Anambra State, Nigeria.

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